

Matthew 10.40-42
28th June 2019

We are ALL sent!

Ten o'clock was the start of the first shift. The headquarters was the Chapel Lounge of my previous church in Yeovil and it was there every Friday and Saturday night that the Street Pastors assembled to get themselves kitted up ready to go out onto the streets and encounter the 'night time economy' of our town. That Saturday night I too donned a high viz jacket and joined them.

Week by week these volunteers from the churches struck up friendly conversations with pub goers, gave out flip flops to girls whose high heels had broken, and special caps to clubbers to stop their drinks being drug spiked.

For the next five hours I was outside my comfort zone. Yet come 3am the next day I had had my photo taken next to the regular Street Pastors by young people tumbling out of clubs who wanted to share that encounter on Facebook, helped two guys who'd had too much to drink get a taxis home, given out over ten pairs of flip flops and had three long conversations about life and God with folk who seemed to love being around these warm-hearted, genuine and kind people called Street Pastors. During that evening it felt to me as if all the glass walls we put up between different sections of society just melted away.

A similar story was told on Songs of Praise which carried a report of a group, this time called Street Angels operating in the

‘night time economy’ of Majorca.

These groups have a burning desire at the heart of all they do – they want to represent the love and compassion of Jesus Christ in a world that can so often seem harsh, confused and lonely, even when you’re in a crowd and I suspect as soon as Lockdown is eased they’ll be back on the streets.

Well this is the third consecutive week that the Lectionary has focussed on Matthew 10 and the Commission Jesus gives to his disciples as he sends them out.

So here are a few thoughts on those verses.

The first is that our lives tell a story.

Matthew has Jesus say this: *To receive you is to receive me, and to receive me is to receive the One who sent me.*

That sounds like serious stuff.

In this chapter Jesus calls his friends, those fishermen who had followed him ‘apostles’. And that word literally means the ‘sent ones’.

Over these last few months we’ve been sending messages in all sorts of ways, some well-trodden, others recently learnt. We are telephoning, emailing, Whatsapping, Zooming and, of course, calling to each other over the garden fence.

Yet in those first century days messages couldn’t even be sent by post – instead they had to go by person. The ancient Jews had a word for a messenger: Shaliach and it’s said that the

character of a Shaliach was chosen so that they represented the character of the person sending them.

Now that's quite a thought isn't it: the character of the messenger represented that of the sender.

Begin to appreciate that and we see the idea of being an apostle not in terms of power or authority but as someone who is prepared to live like Jesus, love like Jesus and maybe even suffer like him.

What story, I wonder, does my life tell? Can something of God's love be seen in the life I lead, the words I speak and the character I hold?

That night as I went from bar to bar, nightclub to nightclub it became clear to me that those Street Pastors with whom I shared those brief five hours seemed to have a glow of kindness and integrity about them that spoke of God and made a positive difference to the atmosphere of the town centre that night. And in receiving them I believe the party goers of Yeovil were in some small way receiving something of Christ.

I've no doubt that during these days of pandemic staying 'in touch' has never been more important and more valued. We've rediscovered that a friendly phone call or email can brighten up the day of those we love. We mustn't just think of each other, we need to reach out to one another and in that process something of God's love is experienced.

I haven't led a service of worship in church now since March 15th but I sense I've met Jesus countless times over in the conversations I've had, the laughter that's echoed round the

Manse on our weekly quiz night, the sight of neighbours clapping on our drive ways, the palpable desire of our politicians and scientists to do the best for us and the selfless service offered to all by frontline workers. God has shared these days with us and his love has, at times, seemed almost tangible.

Now as we move on in the gospel reading here's a thought about supporting ministry.

Verse 41: *Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will be given a prophet's reward, and whoever receives a good man because he is a good man will be given a good man's reward.*

Needs a bit of unpacking, doesn't it!?

Matthew, is I think, bringing to us a concept of community that undercuts hierarchy.

To talk of 'rewards' here is to use that word in the sense of God's favour. It's as if Matthew reports Jesus as saying: God smiles when people serve him and you know you don't have to be an Apostle or a Prophet to make glad the heart of God – you don't have to be an upfront worker, you can be a behind the scenes servant – because God smiles at those good people too.

We know this in church life. There are the up-front people who are comfortable doing the visible jobs. Yet, there is an army of folk who, behind the scenes, work hard and make our community life possible.

I've said before that if you count up the number of people listed in the *Who does What* page of the Church Directory it will come

to around 180 people. Well, before Lockdown we had an average morning congregation of 90, which means most people were doing two jobs each!

Jesus says in this Commissioned Community there are Apostles, Disciples, Prophets and good people – upfront speakers and behind the scene workers - and all make the heart of God glad.

Later in the New Testament Paul would go on to say that in the body of Christ you don't have to be a hand, you can be a foot – in other words every part of the body is to be valued.

And this inclusive way of both considering what ministry is and who can participate in it is carried on through to the last verse of the passage with that memorable one liner: *anyone who gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones will not go unrewarded.*

The commentators tell us that 'little ones' is not so much the way the Early Church described children but ordinary members.

It's as if the emphasis is being corrected as we near the concluding verse of Matthew 10. At the beginning of this chapter it's an Apostolic Commission and maybe that makes spectators of us all. We are not in that league so these words are not for us.

But, by the end of the chapter the talk is of giving cups of cold water to little ones – and that is something everyone can do.

There is a place for you in the Community of Faith. There is a

role for you. There are cups of water to be given out – that is there is loving, prayerful and kind encouragement to be given to one another – and such loving fellowship at the heart of any community makes the heart of God smile.

Over the next few weeks some of us will be coming back to church in person, others will stay at home shielding. Both groups will be worshipping and serving and both groups, I believe, make glad the heart of God

As we move forward into new days, let's never forget that in all we do and say, whether it's in person or over the phone, our calling is to be a messenger who reflects the character of the One who gave us the message.

Matthew 10: it's a Commission for you.
It's a Commission for me.
It's a Commission for all of us.

May it be so, in the name of The Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen